



OWN MATTERS

Newsletter of the Older Women's Network New South Wales

Vol.4 No.3 – April 2007

Safe as Houses

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At the recent NSW Women's Health Summit the topic of Domestic Violence featured significantly, more often than not, the focus of concern was on abuse by partners within relationships. For older women, the profile of the abuser, and the nature of the abuse, often shifts to other family members, carers or people who, under 'normal' circumstances, we should be able to trust.

OWN is part of a newly formed NSW working group on Elder Abuse, exploring both the issues and the potential to implement strategies for change. OWN NSW supports WEL's suggestion that mandatory reporting of abuse of the elderly, such as physical and psychological abuse, neglect and exploitation should also include the seizure of assets and/or cash reserves by relatives or others.

Many older women own their own homes. They are considered 'asset rich', but 'cash poor' - eking out their day-to-day existence on an old age pension. The women themselves, or their nearest and dearest, may see the life-changing potential of converting their one asset via a Reverse Mortgage.

As Sue Field, our guest speaker on Financial Abuse of the Elderly, at last year's OWN NSW State Conference pointed out, inheritance is only meant to be bestowed upon children after you're actually dead. Nevertheless some women may wish to help their children, and do not feel any sense of pressure, or uncertainty when asked for help, or to go guarantor on their child's home loan - but if the deal is so good, why does their bank/ financial institute not want to extend their credit or lend them the full amount?

Choice Magazine just reviewed 23 organisations offering reverse mortgages and found all fell short of providing adequate protection for the person taking out the loan. Those promoting the schemes receive their commission based on the size of the loan taken, and across the board they pushed for the borrowers to undertake loans far in excess of their initial request or requirements. The majority of their clients are older women.

The promoters of Money for Living reverse mortgage scheme have been committed to stand trial for fraud. The scheme collapsed in 2005 leaving dozens of Melbourne retirees without the titles to the homes. The Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) allege the directors gained finance for their business by submitting loan applications that failed to disclose the life tenancies attached to the mortgaged properties.

Due to what they describe as 'glaring deficiencies in product information and vague default clauses' *Choice* claims that in some cases even minor oversights such as falling behind in payment of council rates, not keeping up repairs, or filing an annual occupancy statement, could constitute a default because of the imprecise wording of the terms of the loan. Under contracts that lack a no-negative equity guarantee (one where you can't borrow more than your home is worth), retirees could face losing their homes. *Choice's* investigation has sparked some anxiety in promoters of these schemes, and new schemes with better protection are being developed as this goes to press.

OWN NSW would like to host a forum on a Saturday during May, to which we will be inviting Sue Field, who spoke on Financial Abuse of Older People at our State Conference last year, and guest speakers from Centrelink F.I.S. and ASIC as well as a representative of the reverse mortgage industry, so that you'll have a chance to raise all your questions. We urge you to register your interest early so that we can notify you of further details to you as soon as possible.

Beth Eldridge

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Who Are We?

The Older Women's Network (OWN) NSW is the peak body for 19 groups in NSW. OWN promotes the rights, dignity and wellbeing of older women through a range of activities and resources, and advocates on issues of interest and concern to older women.

OWN Matters is the newsletter of the Older Women's Network NSW. It is published 11 times a year. The annual subscription for individuals is \$22 and \$40 for organisations and includes GST.

Members of OWN groups in NSW are encouraged to contribute to **OWN Matters** with items of interest to older women and Letters to the Editor. They can be sent by mail or email marked Attention – Editorial Team. Please include contact details. Contributions must be received by the second Tuesday of each month.

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POINT of VIEW

The Price of Dissent

Whatever happened to the democratic freedoms we always took for granted? Free speech, for instance.

The Howard government is about to introduce legislation which will use the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to muzzle ethical dissent. This hitherto respected body, which is supposed to be our watchdog against unfair practices, is to be made responsible for intervening *on behalf of corporate Australia* in situations where these bodies have suffered financially due to bans or protests from individuals or community groups on ethical issues.

If the Howard government has its way, uranium miners would have ACCC protection when Aboriginal groups protesting in order to protect their tribal lands have interrupted mining operations. Unions who go to the aid of exploited immigrant workers, or introduce bans on unsafe working sites, could be sued for loss of income by the ACCC acting on behalf of the employer. Community and political campaigners lobbying Japanese woodchip importers to buy plantation timber instead of old growth forest logs could be similarly sued. Environmentalists concerned about the deadly effect on dolphins of the tuna fishing industry could be up against the heavy hand of the ACCC.

And who would be paying for these actions against protesting community groups? We, the taxpayers would, of course. At least in the current situation companies wishing to sue protesters have to fund their own actions.

This cynical exercise in seeking to turn our watchdog into a political attack dog is breathtaking in its arrogance. Is anyone thinking of the McCarthy era in the 1950s, when similar freedoms came under attack?

This is just the latest Howard government move to crush all forms of dissent. An example concerns Community Legal Centres, which give free legal advice to poor and disempowered Australians. They incurred the wrath of Attorney-General Phillip Ruddock by criticising, among other issues, the recent industrial relations legislation. The result? The Community Legal Centres no longer receive government funding for advice to clients on industrial relations matters.

And of course we know all too well that groups which had previously received some government funding but dared to dissent from government policies have long since been de-funded. Similarly, dissenting groups like the Australian Federation of Pensioners and Superannuants, the Association of Civilian Widows and other organisations representing disempowered citizens of this 'free country' have also had their funding cut or discontinued completely. The only groups that still receive a government hand-out are those that don't rock the boat. The Business Council of Australia, – which could hardly be regarded as poor or disadvantaged, – is one of these.

And in case we should think we are still free of censorship, here is an excerpt from a letter to AUSFEM Polnet Email Newsletter from Mary Jenkins: 'While I was watching Senator Bob Brown speaking to the National Press Club the sound went dead when the Senator spoke of Howard. When he moved on to another subject the sound came back. What did he say that upset someone with the finger on the button at the ABC? Is this what we can expect in future?'

The way things are going, Yes Mary, we probably can.

Helen Young

OWN NSW

Coordinators' Report

The elections are out of the way, as are IWD and Seniors Week. Hope you have all enjoyed the celebrations and are all partied out.

I'm happy to report that our OWN breakfast at number 87 was a huge success. Louise Anike gave a very informative talk on the history of International Women's Day to around 35 women. The food was up to the usual OWN standard (excellent) and discussions very informative. We had a visitor who has travelled all around the world and had never heard of IWD until she came to Australia. She decided she wanted to find out more about it and was most impressed by the whole experience. She not only learned more about the day but also about our wonderful network.

Later some went on to the Sydney Town Hall for the march, which was great though sadly it seems to grow smaller each year. As in previous IWD marches OWN was there, carrying our banners and adding our voices.

Beth Eldridge, Terry Tunstall, Morgana Olviver, Joan Van Halen, Jan Robinson, Anne Barber and Yvette Parr womanned a stall in Hyde Park and this was also well received, with lots of enquiries about our organisation. Our new introductory brochure was given to those interested as well as our other literature.

So another huge week where the focus was on Women, Women's Issues and Older Women has passed.

Time to get back to work.

Please note in your diary that the next Quarterly Meeting will be held on Tuesday, 8 May. There will be more about it in the next *OWN Matters* but in the meantime Beth is working on a most interesting program that will make this meeting a day we will all enjoy. To those who don't normally come to the Quarterly Meeting this would be a

good time meet some very lively ladies and to hear discussions that we hope will make you think, laugh and be inspired.

Speaking of *OWN Matters*, we are looking for items from both new and old contributors. We know from speaking to members there are many stories out there and we would love to hear them. It's always great to hear what the groups are doing, and lately there seems to be creeping through a sort of "I remember when" theme. We all have memories and sharing them with our readers will not only bring them to mind again, it will remind us all, that we have had, and continue to have such interesting lives. Some of the things that make them interesting are the little things, the things that made us laugh or cry or realise we live in a wonderful world.

I am sorry to have to report that the group at Shellharbour no longer exists. Nan Pitt had served the group since its inception and when she had to give it up at the beginning of the year she was unable to find anyone willing to take over her role. We thank Nan for all her hard work over many years and wish her well in whatever direction her life is now taking her.

Your management team is looking a lot stronger with the welcome back to Cate Turner and Brenda Hodgkinson. They both had to hit the ground running but are very capable ladies and we are very happy to see them back at our meetings. We are a hard-working team and with Beth and Kris to show us the way it is our aim to serve the members of the network to the best of our ability. Any feed back you would care to give would be greatly appreciated.

Bye for now, stay focused and enjoy every moment of every day.

Barbara Malcolm

OWNING OWN

The Older Women's Network could not have existed without the constant valuable work done by volunteers, for which we are most thankful.

OWNING OWN is a morning set aside for us to have a kind of 'thank you'. We'd like you to come and share with us what you have enjoyed about OWN, and how you feel you have benefited in some way.

Over the years many good things have been said about OWN by others, but we have never asked our members for positive comments before.

Please bring some food, so that we can munch, crunch and lunch together and get inside one another's heads.

See you at 87 Lower Fort Street at 10.30am, Friday 27 April.

OWN 20 YEARS OLD!

Are you aware that OWN is 20 years old in November this year?

We deserve a celebration, a 'birthday party'. a 'SURVIVAL PARTY' even.

Interested? If so, contact Lola, Peggy or Lorraine with your ideas about what we should do to celebrate.

This means everyone in every OWN group, Australia wide.

One idea suggested, so far, is putting together an anthology of writing since the last anthology was produced. This could not be done by *OWN Matters* editorial committee alone.

It would need volunteers.

Perhaps the topic of our possible celebrations could be workshopped at OWN NSW AGM /conference?

Let us know.

Peggy Hewett, Lola Cummings, Lorraine Inglis (OWN Sydney 9247 7046)

OWN, You're Bloody Marvellous!

Last month, OWN received an unusual request - could someone from OWN come and talk to an OM:NI (Older Men, New Ideas) men's group in Glebe about how we got started and what activities we organise? Because my late husband, Jack, was one of the founders of OM:NI, I volunteered to go, and it was a great learning experience for me. OM:NI had been a project of COTA NSW (Council on the Ageing) which employed a coordinator who also published a monthly magazine. However, this is no longer the case and representatives from the various OM:NI groups across NSW are trying to organise a network among themselves.

The OWN brochure explains briefly how we got started, but what I didn't know is that funding from the Family and Children's Services and the Myer Foundation enabled

workshops for older women to be held in Sydney and country areas and a full-time position for a researcher (actually 2 women shared this job). A range of issues including health, housing, home-maintenance, and financial and legal problems were researched. All this information is contained in a workshop manual which is available to read at OWN's office, and I urge as many people as possible to read it, because its fascinating and very informative.

Armed with a stack of pamphlets, manuals and brochures, which I left with the group of 5 men who were there, I was able to share information and I felt damn proud of how we function and what we do! How many of us actually take a moment to think about how unique OWN is, and how much we gain from being part of it. In particular, I salute all those visionary women, some of whom are no longer with us, who got this great organisation off the ground, and brought it to where it is now.

I hope that OM:NI will be able to organise a network and grow in strength, which was part of Jack's vision, and I know for a fact that he got the idea because of what he saw in OWN.

Pat Zinn

Recollections of a Rebel

An original member of OWN visits our past and our present.

I was a rebel at 15. Soon I'll be 87. Naturally, I've joined women's organisations that stood for gender equality. In the 50s and 60s I marched with small bands of women on city pavements – not the roadways – to mark International Women's Day.

A Garment Workers strike in New York in the 20s had become the hallmark for honouring women's struggles on March 8, International Women's Day.

The Union of Australian Women, to which I belonged, campaigned solidly for equal pay for women. Conditions among women postal workers, nurses and clothing trades were notoriously bad. An older woman, Edna Ryan, led many such struggles for equal pay. In her honour, the Women's Electoral Lobby annually issues 'Edna' awards for feminist achievements. OWN members have received many 'Ednas'.

The 60s and 70s saw large rallies of women unite in demands for gender equality – in society, in politics and in the home, where child care was needed to allow women to re-enter the workforce. Gains were won.

But older women were ignored – were invisible – in most reforms. So the Older Women's Network formed in 1987. Heavy lobbying brought federal funding and representation on government committees. We even had Paul Keating's intended address to a national women's conference changed overnight to include older women's issues – and got national funding.

Conservatism in politics has not improved the situation of Australian women. Women's income still lags behind men's. Women bear most of the burden of child care and aged care in the face of government neglect.



Domestic violence damages women of all ages.

The 'glass ceiling' remains. Younger women and older women still average lower incomes than men. Lack of adequate child care and aged care adds to our problems. And Work Choices law can deny choice for women.



Academic researchers declare that women's activism has declined as cynical legislation deprives us of life choices, sometimes on so-called moral grounds. The ageing of our population is seen as a disaster rather than a resource.

What more timely occasion for commitment to a resurgence of our voices than coming elections. Some men may be lobbying scandalously for personal economic and political advantage. We need to harness our energies to realise genuine equality, more parliamentary representation, improved health, caring and other services, a sustainable environment, for peace. We have many issues of common concern that are in the spirit of International Women's Day. As for social action by older women, I believe age may weary us, but will not deter us!

IWD talk 8.3.07 – Noreen Hewett

Many Rivers to Cross

Many rivers to cross

And it's only my will that keeps me alive

My inspiration was music and song by Jimmy Cliff, an Afro-American man of the Deep South, who had obviously metaphorically crossed

many deep, swift-flowing rivers in his life. In our lives, and in older age, we – as women – have crossed rivers and still need to cross more, towards the going down of the sun.

It seems to me that deep in the psyche of many people lurks a fear of mortality and a fear of older age incapacity. In some, the fear transforms into a punitive and castigatory urge towards elders. This sort of error takes the path-of-least-resistance, categorizing individuals as having a common condition such as Alzheimer's, Dementia and Parkinson's and, by dismissing us with these labels, they threaten a good "old age". Do not bother telling me this does not happen – it happened to me and may I tell you it shocked me. It was all in the name of well-meaning and personal care. With the help of OWN members and others, that is history now.

Another common label to confine womankind alive is the tendency of some men (uneasy in their relations with gender) to describe women as the 'weaker sex' – which is a joke considering childbirth. This label is another easy path-of-least-resistance to follow, though perhaps not as much as of yore. Some men delight in putting intelligent women 'in their place'. We all know there are men who consider 'fat', 'plain', or 'old' as unsightly and offensive. They lump us with these labels irrespective of whether *they* are aged or pot-bellied. This is a deep river for us to cross as we are dealing with unconscious sexual drives.

Another swirling in our society are expressions of jingoism, xenophobia, nationalism, chauvinism using insignia, *vis-à-vis* the use of symbols, flags, signs to draw together *Us* versus *Them*. Trivia but not trivial as Nazi Germany at its worst represented. But I cannot write about racial hatred in all truth because I have never been subjected to this scourge. I am not congratulating myself about that!

It is only by the recognition of the combined honest and decent elements

that we can safely cross the murky rivers' depths to thrive and survive well. The moving song of Jimmy Cliff proves he has heard it loud and clear. He has been conditioned to recognize unhealthy elements and trends. We need to recognize them too.

Enid Harrison

Getting Into Things

One of the problems we encounter as we age is called 'Getting into Things'. Hands of the elderly/disabled are simply not strong enough to open lids of many varieties of jars of jam, pickles, etc. Cans give problems too. Can openers – even the more elaborate, expensive kind – need more strength than I have. Opening thick cardboard packaging is also tough – even with scissors.

Of course, foodstuffs need to be protected from damage or tampering, but how to deal with some of them?

Food in plastic containers can be frustrating, although if you know how some of them work it is easier. Even unwrapped food presents problems – try cutting a hard pumpkin, for instance. Nothing smaller than a large carving knife will do the job.

Medicinal tubes often have screwtops that must come off and be reversed so that the small point inside the top can be used to pierce the sealed tube. That is, if you can manage it.

Louise Anike



Theatre Group Report

To celebrate Seniors' week in The Warrumbungle, the Shire Council called in the OWN Theatre Group for five one-hour concerts. We performed over three days in **Baradine, Coonabarabran, Mendooran, Binnaway and Dunedoo**. It was a fast and successful tour. The first day was perhaps the most physically demanding for us, having left our beds at the crack of dawn, travelled by train for five hours, then by bus for two hours. Arriving in Coonabarabran we then met our host families who were billeting us, and that evening rehearsed hard for nearly two hours. David, a cheerful young man, was our tour bus driver. He soon displayed talents as guide, entertainer and roadie. The blessings of a roadie to lift and load prop bags, keyboard and all the paraphernalia accompanying eight women on tour was much appreciated.

We had a little time to explore the town of Coonabarabran (900 pop); some of us visited the Warrumbungle National Park with its stark,

Open Wide

I considered it a tragedy when, in my late 30's, I found myself with an upper denture, but as I suffered no great discomfort I soon adjusted to wearing it.

Fortunately, I still retain my natural lower teeth, although three extractions of back teeth resulted in a partial plate – two teeth on the left, one on the right – constructed on a bridge, which meant removing them for eating purposes.

This partial plate caused much amusement and embarrassment when it fell from my pocket on three occasions, the first being on the floor under the table in the pub where I was lunching with a group of women from OWN. The second time, I left it at a friend's house and received it back neatly wrapped. On the last occasion, when I alighted from a taxi, my Asian driver called to me 'Excuse please, you lose something?' and there were my my damned teeth on the back seat.

This notorious plate no longer fits my mouth, as my faithful lower teeth are beginning to loosen and spread.

About two years ago I attended the Dental Hospital, where my teeth were cleaned with the famous "Clean Machine" combined with a tube of water running into my mouth. Know the one?

I contacted the local private dentist and explained that I could not tolerate this machine; being asthmatic with breathing problems, this treatment would cause me to choke. He listened with great interest and agreed to clean

primeval rock formations where we also saw numbers of kangaroos, emus and wallabies. Others went up to Siding Spring, site of the largest astronomy observatory in Australia. A few of us swooped on a half price shoe sale! Then a visit to the Crystal Kingdom - a fascinating museum of the crystals and semi-precious rocks collected from the site of the Warrumbungle and nearby extinct volcanoes displayed as a wonderful geological storyline.

We had our own drama when a tyre blew as we sped to Dunedoo on the last morning. A couple of truckies stopped to lend David a hand. Even with their help we were delayed for forty minutes. We must have been an unusual sight dressed in our white and purple uniforms and grouped under roadside eucalypt trees. Our patient Dunedoo audience gave us a great reception. Then it was a dash to Dubbo just in time for the Sydney train!

Joan Modder

my teeth by hand, and he charged only part of his fee.

All went well until my dentist advised me that my teeth were beginning to loosen. I then waited a couple of months for a Dental Hospital appointment for assessment.

The dentist pricked my gums (ouch!), x-rayed my teeth and advised me against a lower partial denture. He would clean my teeth for as long as possible.

When I explained my reasons for intolerance of machine cleaning with water, and why I had attended a private dentist, he insisted that hand cleaning was not as good a method as the machine.

NO, I would not submit to this, as I would die or choke. He then offered to freeze my gums so that I would not feel the effects!

When I complained that Government neglect was to blame for dental neglect, I was reminded of all the expensive equipment they had provided. Oh yeah ... it wouldn't help me at all.

I had the last word. Rising from the chair, I said as loudly as I could, "Well, I can save the Government a lot of expense. I can just wait for my damned teeth to fall out."

Is that the Tooth Fairy I see waiting in the wings? I sincerely hope not. I'm off for an appointment with my wonderful local dentist in March.

Marie Williams

What's On in April

April usually offers the best weather of the whole year in Sydney, so get out and enjoy.

During April: Palm Sunday 1st, Royal Easter Show 5th to 18th, Anzac Day 25th, Woolloomooloo Festival Saturday 21st.

Rockin' for Rights

Sunday 22 April: Protest March, Hyde Park to Sydney Cricket Ground

Assemble 11.00 am, Hyde Park North. LIVE CONCERT
Concert Wristbands \$5

Parramatta Girls

19 April: Belvoir Theatre, 2pm, Unwaged Performance.

Inmates of the Girls' Training School, Parramatta had just about as hard an upbringing as you can get in Australia. This vibrant new play stars eight dames, a mob of great Australian actresses.

Art Gallery of NSW

April: Archibald, Wynne and Sulman exhibits..

Conducted tours Monday to Friday, 12, 1pm, 3pm, Weds 7.15pm.

Archibald Celebrity Talk, 6.30pm Weds

S.H. Ervin Gallery

Salon des Refuses. The portraits that were not accepted for the Archibald.

Sydney Town Hall

10 April, 12.30pm to 1.30 pm, free lunchtime concert, Thomas Heywood.

Talks and Squawks

Gaelic Club, Devonshire St, Surry Hills, Fridays 6pm

Politics in the Pub:

13th Social Democracy – the signs from Europe

20th What has Howard done to our institutions?

27th Australia's latest security treaties with Indonesia

Sydney Mechanics School of Arts

in Pitt St, Sydney

4th 12:30 Impacts and history of on-line activism

11th 12:30 To what extent can the individual affect change?

Gleebooks

Glebe Point Rd.

6:30 for 7:00, bookings 96602333, \$10/\$7

12th Say It Out Loud – Adam Sutton and Neil McMahon - The moving story of the gay cowboy.

23rd Bad Dreaming: Aboriginal Men's Violence Against Women and Children – Louis Nowra.

MOVIES

Sydney Mechanics School of Arts, Pitt St, Sydney

25th 6 pm. Meet the Film Maker: Free film followed by Q&A with the film maker. (A regular on the last Wednesday of each month.

State Library of NSW

Alternate Fridays, 12.10pm. Free film, Metcalfe 92731770

University of the Third Age

Suite 102, 15-17 Young St., Sydney

At this address you can join and get the program for all kinds of courses in all areas of Sydney.

Wesley School for Seniors

has had to cut back, only 500 students, only 2 classes each. You must register April 2. \$35 per term.

An Option for Unwanted Fridge Removals

If you live in metropolitan Sydney and have a working second fridge that is at least 10 years old and larger than 250 litres (e.g. bigger than a bar fridge) you may be eligible to participate in Fridge Buyback. All spare fridges that meet the eligibility criteria listed in the Terms (refer website) can be collected, free of charge - and \$35 is payable to the owner plus other 'green' bonuses.

Go to <http://www.fridgebuyback.com.au/> for more information

At and Beyond the Rocks

Sydney OWN

How the months speed past, and it's time for another Sydney OWN report. March, as always, is a busy month with IWD and Seniors Week. OWN breakfast was a resounding success with 35 women attending. Plenty of food and lots of chat, with women who don't meet so often catching up with each other. Louise Anike gave an interesting talk on the history of IWD and many women reminisced about their own involvement, some of them since their early youth. Quite a few of us followed up with the rally at Town Hall Square, and marched to Hyde Park.

The attendance was



disappointing as to numbers and one can't help wondering whether we will ever regain the old enthusiasm. Sydney OWN/OWN NSW shared a table with WEL at Hyde Park. Quite a few women, some of whom had never heard of OWN, collected information about us. Hopefully we might attract new members just waiting to become volunteers.

On Friday April 27 we are holding a forum on 'Owning OWN' at 87 Lower Fort St which will be facilitated by Louise

Anike and we hope to hear from you about your experiences as members of OWN. We look forward to seeing lots of women. Bring a plate, share lunch and have a whale of a time. Until then au revoir and good health.

Judith Mustard

OWN Your Village

This is the first report by the OWN Networking Wonder Woman (as this job was officially advertised) also known as Sue Kucharova.

So, here I am, a little over one month in a job, which on 2 days per week amounts to little over 8 days, and what have I got to show for it?

If you happen to live in one of the villages, we are focusing on, i.e. Glebe, Redfern and the CBD, then you might have already met me and been subjected to the **WHAT**, **HOW** and **WHO** questioning about the nature of your local community and your own connections within it. So far I have been focusing on the Glebe village, and only recently started to follow up services and contacts in Redfern and its immediate surrounds. I seem to have talked to many people already and have made lots of connections across different groups and services. If you are on the OWN membership list and live in one of the focus areas, you can be sure you'll hear from me sooner or later and I hope that you will agree to help me with my enquiries.

WHAT questions refer to the local groups and activities that older women might be involved in. These might include wellness/fitness/health activities, discussion groups, activists groups, aged services, worship affiliations as well as gaps in services or concerns you might have about your community.

HOW questions are those that would tell me where to find women who might not be involved in the support networks that often develop as a result of women participating in the above mentioned activities. Of course the **HOW** to find them and **HOW** to get them involved will be the hardest part of this project, a task that might require Zena's steel qualities instead of Wonder Woman's sparkle.

The **WHO** questions will lead me to people in your community who might know others to help with the **HOW**.

So this is the plan and I would like to thank those OWN members who have already supported the project with either its management, cups of tea and information they provided or will do so in the future. Of course, you can always volunteer to contact me before I find you, (and believe me I will).

You can e mail me at: ownsydney@ownnsw.org.au or skucharo@bigpond.net.au, or phone Sydney OWN office: 9251 9333, or OWN NSW on 9247 7046 and leave a message.

Sue Kucharova

At and Beyond the Rocks

Southern Highlands

I did not send in a report on the Southern Region Get Together, which was way back in February, so I will now redress that lapse with the report, written for our Newsletter, by SHOWN member Eve van der Sander.

On Thursday 8 February, SHOWN hosted the first Southern Regional Get Together for this year. The event took place in the Bowral Memorial hall. Some 47 members attended, including 7 members from Nowra, 6 from Wollondilly, 5 from Illawarra, and 2 from the OWN Management team.

The theme for the day was "for members to learn what other groups do and to share information and ideas." The whole exercise proved to be very fruitful for all and everybody participated with great enthusiasm.

This was followed by a scrumptious luncheon prepared by Carol Landrigan and her helpers. Thank you, Carol!

After lunch the representatives from the OWN Management team passed on important and relevant information to the members.

The fun segment for the afternoon was a folk dancing session, led by SHOWN members who belong to the Southern Highlands International Dancers, which everyone enjoyed immensely. A delicious afternoon tea, again prepared by Carol and her helpers, followed this.

OWN Southern Regional Get

Togethers are held twice yearly and the next one will be held in Nowra in August.

From all accounts our International Women's Day event was most enjoyable. I could not attend so, once again, I will include a report written for our Newsletter, this time by SHOWN member Trish Newnham.

On International Women's Day, 8 March 2007, some 30 or more members of SHOWN gathered at the famed Bradman Oval, Bowral for the first official game of French Cricket to be played on this hallowed ground. (The sacred pitch of course was forbidden territory).

Picnic baskets, chairs and tables were set up on the side lawn, Bradman volunteers welcomed us, and the game was under way. After rules were discussed two groups began play with much jollity and banter. Photographs were taken and after a break, play began again. Thunderclouds gathered and we all took to the pavilion veranda to finish lunch - the Easter egg raffle was drawn (winner Vera).

Light rain put a damper on further play, but none the less we managed to continue having fun.

A delicious afternoon tea was provided in the pavilion, served by the volunteer ladies. Tea and coffee, scones with jam and cream were consumed amid friendly chatter, and then with a warning of an approaching hail storm we headed for our cars and home. A really enjoyable day!

So far this has been the easiest *OWN Matters* report I have ever written but I guess now I have to do some of the work.

We were fortunate to have Sue Field talk to us about financial matters - "financial matters" sounds either deadly boring or rather threatening but Sue managed to awaken the interest of the most 'I-am-not interested-in-financial-matters' members, and allay the fears of the most 'please-don't-talk-to-me-about-finances-I-can't-cope' among our members. Some of us had enjoyed hearing Sue at last year's OWN NSW Conference, which prompted us to invite her to the Southern Highlands. It was good to meet her again.

The WENCHes sang at the local Seniors Week concert, to a small but appreciative audience. Two people who were there have booked us for functions later in the year and we will be singing for Moss Vale hospital Auxiliary in May.

Robyn Smith

Wagga Wagga OWN

I've just taken up the role of secretary, continuing on from the marvelous work of Muriel Waddell. Wagga Wagga OWN continues to enjoy a close partnership with the Wagga Women's Health Service who provide so much help and backup for us.

Last Friday myself and two other members, Ailsa Breasley and Pam Scott, attended the Charles Sturt University where we were booked to give a talk on the positive side of ageing

At and Beyond the Rocks

to 3rd year nursing students. The lecturer shocked us by revealing we would be in charge of the lesson, but we managed to regain our composure and deliver an impressive seminar.

I started with a prepared talk about the Older Women's Network, then the three of us talked about how we coped and the many ways of living in an age where the older generation seem to be invisible. I noticed a lot of note-taking and then we had a session where we answered lots of questions from the students (60 of them). The lecturer was very happy with our contribution!

Judith Constable



Bankstown Wellness

This is a photo of the banner that was produced at the International Women's Day (IWD) Celebration Day held at the Wran Leisure Centre at Villawood on Friday, March 9. Our Wellness Centre worked in partnership with the Bankstown Women's Issues Network and other NGOs on this project. More than 120 women and many children attended the day's activities, which also included beading, aqua exercise, henna tattooing and a performance by a Polynesian group from Bankstown Girls High School.

Jan Malley

Wollondilly

Although it was the end of February before we had our first meeting for 2007, we had two train trips to Sydney prior to that. One to the Observatory which was very interesting, and the second for a tour of the Opera House, not only a very beautiful building but an amazing feat of engineering. Since then we've had an outing by bus to Minnamurra Falls. The rain forest is a haven of peace and tranquility and to walk through it is like a moving meditation, a truly beautiful place. Some of our group also attended the Regional Get Together in February put on by the Southern Highlands. We enjoyed meeting members from other groups and exchanging ideas and experiences. There was a delicious lunch and afternoon tea and dancing in the afternoon for everyone to join in. Congratulations to SHOWN for a great day.

On 4 March we had our stall at the Thirlmere Steam Festival which attracts thousands of people and although there were many many stalls we took over two hundred dollars. Our drummers were part of the entertainment in the morning.

In February the drumming group performed at a Hindu Wedding held at a beautiful property near Picton. In honour of the occasion, instead of our black and red ponchos we wore colourful sari material skirts (made by Barbara Malcolm) and white cotton tops. It was all very different and very exciting.

This week we celebrated IWD again at the Picton Bowling Club, who provided a delicious choice of hot food for a breakfast that seemed to go on all morning with people coming and going. Our guest speaker was Patti Dench a local person who was a Bronze Medalist in target shooting at the 1978 Games. She regaled us with some of her exciting and sometimes funny experiences. There was also entertainment by two exotic belly dancing ladies and our drummers. We are looking forward to a good year, with nice things to come.

Audrey Van Dragt

Newcastle

We were fortunate to get a \$500 grant for Seniors Week. Having not applied for this grant for several years, we were pleased and surprised to have been successful. Our membership is now up to 36, and at least half of these members would not have been in OWN when we last organised a Seniors Week program.

Because we operate from the Youth Centre our theme this year was, "Young and Old Unite". 'Cimatree', a young women's singing group that started through the Youth Centre entertained us during morning tea, and as one of the items, 3 played guitar and 2 sang. They were too excited to get paid to perform and they had to open a bank account to put the cheque into!

Our friend, the 'laughter man', who some in OWN will have heard before, started the program. You laugh so hard you

At and Beyond the Rocks

tingle all over. Two OWN members told part of their life story and we did our 'Cinderella' skit, as our members had never seen it. Members provided a yummy morning tea and a good time was had by all.

We also had a display of members' arts and crafts - knitting, pottery, painting, tatting, embroidery and, of course, cooking. As well, we were fortunate to have some of the 2006 HSC students' work adorn the walls. The exhibition was just finishing so we asked if some could be displayed.

Regular coffee mornings have been happening once a month, for months now. At first we only had four or five members attending but at the last coffee morning 20 members and friends attended. Our pattern is that every second month we meet somewhere in Beaumont Street, Hamilton, which is handy for transport, then the other months we meet at different locations. Once we met at Bar Beach and members who wished went for a swim. In January and February we enrolled four new members and the coffee mornings are a great way to meet.

Many of our members knit or crochet squares for 'Wrap with Love'. We had a good display of rugs ready for distribution and it's not winter yet.

With statistics showing that Newcastle's population is ageing faster than the rest of NSW, the City Council has recently released a Seniors Policy draft. This came as a bit of a surprise to us - Newcastle

OWN had participated in the research for the policy in 2004, and after three years we thought the whole thing had been forgotten. The *Newcastle Star* published a photo of Gwen Knipe and Patricia Cornish reading the policy draft and, when interviewed by the *Star's* Melanie Riding, they took the opportunity to highlight the need for seniors to have a place where they can socialise as well as organise exercise classes and other events. They pointed out that councils in many other areas have funded Wellness Centres for this purpose.

A Working Party has been looking into starting a Feldenkrais group. We had a woman come up from the Central Coast to demonstrate Feldenkrais and many members thought they would benefit from it, but at the moment it looks prohibitively expensive. There is nobody in Newcastle teaching Feldenkrais and with paying for the woman to come from the Central Coast (over an hour's drive away), as well as her fee, it's not looking good. After visiting Sutherland a couple of years ago we wanted to start an International Dance group, but nobody in Newcastle teaches international dance. There is a woman teaching circle dancing on Saturday but she works through the week. We are looking for something different to offer older women as Tai Chi and other exercise groups abound in Newcastle, many of which our members attend.

Gwenda Fulford

Discriminating Doctors

Doctors are still denying older people the sorts of tests and treatment they would offer to younger patients, reveals a survey in *Quality and Safety in Health Care*.

Half of those surveyed were influenced by a patient's age in their decisions on whether to send a patient for tests or prescribe treatment. Patients over 65 were managed differently from those who were younger.

The findings are based on a survey of almost 90 general practitioners, specialists in care of the elderly, and cardiologists from across Southern England and the Midlands.

Participants were specifically quizzed about their intended management of 72 fictional patients with angina, using a specially devised computer programme, and face to face structured interviews.

The fictional patients were all aged between 45 and 92, with varying degrees of severity of heart problems. Head and shoulders photographs of people who had agreed to be the fictional patients were also provided.

Overall, older patients were less likely than middle aged patients to be referred to a cardiologist and given an angiogram or exercise tolerance tests.

But they were significantly more likely to have their medication changed and told to come back at a later date.

Half of the doctors in each of the three professional groups treated older patients differently.

One doctor commented: "I'd like to think that I would treat the individual. I think generally you have to try and identify from an individual what is in their best interests. I don't think bypass surgery in an 87 year old is in their interests."

British Medical Journal

Aboriginal Support Circle Issues

Bush Tucker Production

Increases in food prices in remote areas may be contributing to obesity and chronic disease among people of low socio-economic status. It is estimated that costs of transportation and refrigeration, double handling of produce through secondary wholesalers and small numbers of consumers push the price of a food basket up 30% more than in urban areas. But bush tucker, initially for elderly Aboriginal people, many of whom have asked for the food they consumed in their youth, will soon go into production at Menindee, in the state's far west. The focus will be on fruits and vegetables at first, eg. bush tomato, quandong, acacia, citrus, desert lime, sandalwood and lemon myrtle.

Les MacDonald, chief executive officer of Meals on Wheels, has been inspired by aunty Beryl Carmichael, 71, an elder of the Ngiyaampaa people. For years, she has been taking Aboriginal people, and people from other cultures, into the bush to teach them how to relate to the bush and survive there.

Bush Tucker, which has virtually no fat, little salt, plenty of antioxidants, has been demonstrated to reduce susceptibility to diabetes and to improve the condition of those who have it.

Pat Zinn

Aboriginal Children Rescued After Five Months

On 3 December 2006 on page 23 of the *Sunday Telegraph* there was an article about Aboriginal children in a remote area who were finally rescued after being stranded without food for five months, due to a breakdown in Government services.

Months of the community's appeals for help from local authorities had been ignored. Their teacher reported that during this period they went many days without any food at all.

And this story barely made it to page 23 of the *Sunday Telegraph* – less than 100 words in the whole article! How many page 1's were devoted to the fictitious story of 'The Children Overboard'?

I cannot believe here was a story that really needed and deserved to be brought to the public

notice, yet it was relegated to such obscurity. It's a monumental scandal.

Barbara Malcolm

National Indigenous TV to be Launched Soon

It has been estimated that indigenous-made programming accounts for 1.2 percent – less than two hours – of all the media content broadcast each week in Australia. But all that is about to change, according to Pat Turner, who has been appointed as chief executive of National Indigenous Television.

Federal Communications Minister, Helen Coonan, has allotted \$48.5 million dollars to be spread over four years, a minuscule amount in TV industry terms, but Pat is grateful for this opportunity to have more representation of indigenous content in the media.

NITV's debut broadcast in June will be carried on the second satellite channel of Aboriginal-run commercial broadcaster Imparja, with a potential to reach remote settlements in the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, and western NSW, but Pat's ambition is to reach not only the entire indigenous population of approximately 500,000, but all Australians, from the Alice-based station. In New Zealand, Maori TV also started out small, but now it has a huge non-Maori (pakeha) audience. She is looking at the internet, negotiating with pay-TV broadcaster Foxtel and wants the new Channel A licenseholder, to be decided later this year, to carry NITV.

Apart from recruiting skilled staff, Pat has appointed researchers who are logging all indigenous programs in the catalogues of the ABC, SBS and the Australian Film Commission, and scouting for material in Aboriginal communities across Australia. NITV will be acquiring and commissioning all its content, children's programs being a priority. It is also hoped to promote and maintain indigenous languages, one or two of which die every year.

Pat's dream is for NITV to have its own national, terrestrial free-to-air broadcaster, the same as ABC and SBS.

Pat Zinn



Aboriginal Support Circle Issues

Noel Pearson's Vision

Well-known Aboriginal Cape York leader Noel Pearson has set in motion a radical experiment to improve health, education and employment within five years in four Cape York communities administered by the Cape York Institute. The scheme will operate at Coen, Hope Vale, Aurukun and Mossman Gorge, and it is hoped that these communities will be revitalised and operating in real economies within a generation.

Pearson's reform agenda rests on the rebuilding of social norms - manners, grooming, standards, expectations and rules of behaviour – and with redefining access to welfare by paying incentives for behaviour that improves education, health and the prospects of the next generation finding work. A Families Commission in each community - perhaps two elders and a retired magistrate - would be empowered to make orders that dictate and direct payments, using the carrot and stick approach, e.g. payment if the children not only get to school, but get adequate sleep, are clean, and are fed regularly. If a parent is drinking, they would be sent for counselling and their income payment redirected to another relative who would look after the children. Under existing law such coercion would be illegal, but Pearson has emphasised to government ministers in Canberra that this discrimination is crucial to the program's success. In the meantime, he is talking to communities, determining what the problems are and what mechanisms might fix them.

In Coen, where land was returned to the Ayapathu clan, Allan Creek and his wife have their own herd of cattle on 225,000 hectares, after 40 years mustering other people's cattle. Their philosophy, and that of his sister Ann, is that work brings rewards, education brings opportunities, rights bring responsibilities. They believe that inactivity or passivity, encouraged by welfare drip-feeding brings disease, despair and death to their children and grandchildren. Ann Creek, a grandmother who set up a local Aboriginal corporation 14 years ago, will be central to the process in Coen.

A kindergarten teacher in Coen, Megan Irving, who has been there for 14 years, says Pearson's plan has to work "because this is the last straw". For the past few years she has been overseeing

the budgets of almost half of Coen's population of 300, running a financial management program whereby welfare payments go directly into accounts to cover rent, bills and education.

The principal of the school, Ken Crowther, says school attendance rates are reasonable but standards lag behind the mainstream and when students have to go south to high school, the gap is too much for most. As few as 6% finish high school.

Rhys Gardiner, a justice worker, says that abuse is rare but neglect is another story. Troublemakers these days are often sentenced to a stretch on the homelands, like Allan Creek's station, where hard work and no grog "gets their heads straight".

Dean Taylor, a flying doctor who visits the clinic each week, worries about the decline in mental health caused by sedentary lives and substance abuse. Suicide is disproportionately high.

Hopefully, Noel Pearson's vision will become a reality not only in Cape York, but in other areas in Australia. As Ann Creek says, "Kids need education and challenge. We work in a white world. It is no good hiding behind culture because we are afraid of taking the steps forward. If we don't nurture our future, who will?"

Pat Zinn

Need a Computer?

Do you know anyone that would benefit from owning a computer?

Wesley E-Recycling specialises in refurbishing computers for individuals, families and community organisations in need. We have a range of low cost computer packages starting from \$50.

Contact Wesley on 02 9572 3200 or visit their website: www.wesleycomputers.org for package details and pricing.

Healthcare card holders and non-profit organisations receive Microsoft Windows 2000 software free of charge.



Letters to the Editor

For God's Sake!

It's a sad day when a university is prepared to abdicate its academic autonomy, no matter what the reason. I refer to the University of Sydney's decision to conform to the Catholic Church's stipulation that stem cell and associated research will not be conducted in buildings to be erected on land to which the Church has given the University access.

I have no argument in this matter with the Catholic Church, which must pursue its own dogma, but I am appalled that, for financial reasons, an Australian university should abandon the absolute academic independence that is supposed to be the hallmark of such institutions.

This is shocking in itself, but the dangerous aspect is that it has set a precedent. What conditions could a huge corporation impose on a University along with a huge donation? Next thing, we'll have the government threatening to withdraw funding if academics don't toe the line.

It seems that integrity has become an old-fashioned concept, like honour and morality. Not to mention common sense.

Helen Young

Merciful Heavens!

So OWN's next state conference is to be held at Sancta Sophia College at Sydney University! Lots of good reasons were given, and our Coordinators have expended shoe leather and sweat to achieve this arrangement. But I wonder if we shall be able to discuss voluntary euthanasia, stem cells, abortion and other vital topics?

We must combat all forms of censorship so frequently exerted against us all these days.

Margaret Sargent

Your Preference Counts

I really look forward to receiving *OWN Matters* and am impressed by the articles and the amount of research gone into most of them. Very rarely is there an error of fact.

However, Brenda's call about voting preferences is one of those errors. In the NSW election there are no registered party preference tickets. Whether in the Legislative Assembly or Legislative Council, your preferences will go exactly how you mark them on the ballot paper, they cannot be given away to another Party. In fact, in this election, you need not indicate a preference at all. A number one in any candidate's box is a formal vote. Should your nominated candidate not be elected, no preference will flow from your vote.

In the federal election, later this year, the system is different. On the House of Representatives ballot paper, a voter must number every square to have a formal vote. This means that the voter has to indicate all her preferences. But again, the Party cannot pass the vote on to another Party.

The Senate is different again: if you vote No. 1 above the line, the preferences will flow according to the Party's Registered Preference Ticket. These tickets are displayed at every polling booth. If you do not agree with these preference flows, you have the choice of voting below the line, where you will indicate your own preferences.

It's a pity that neither the State Electoral Commission nor its Commonwealth equivalent has provided an education campaign so that voters understand the two different systems. No wonder confusion reigns.

Joan Lambert

Sounds Like A Great Idea

I am amazed to read complaints about difficulty in reading *OWN Matters'* small print. For some years we have been producing an audio version every month that is available to subscribers at no extra charge. There have been only a few takers.

Helen is right in saying that normal ageing eyesight makes small print a problem.

In the middle of this year we shall be putting the audio version on CD instead of audio-cassette, and it will be easy to produce more copies and send them to members. If you are interested, please give me a ring on 9660-5925, or let Kris know on 9247-7046.

Margaret Sargent

Cumberland State Forest

On a very hot day in February, my friend Joyce introduced me to the Cumberland State Forest in West Pennant Hills, Sydney. What a cool and beautiful haven from the Summer humidity within the burbs.

We walked along the sensory trail, which is accessible for sight-impaired people with the use of a rope as guide and Braille on labelling. When it is cooler we'll do one of the longer walks. As we finished we noticed a shelter which is available for community groups and schools. Also lovely picnic areas. We wandered through the Information Centre and shop. I bought *A Bushwalkers' Guide to Eucalypts*. We finished up with a lovely coffee and shared a lunch (a little expensive - \$18 for a salmon wrap) in Café Saligna.

This area was resumed for farming in 1908. In 1938 the then NSW Forestry Commission took over the management of 40 hectares, some of

Letters to the Editor

which was allowed to regenerate naturally back to the original indigenous species and a third was planted as an arboretum.

I recommend this as a most enjoyable outing. The address is 95 Castle Hill Road and the phone number is 1 300 655 687. Web address – www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/forests. Great idea for an OWN event.

Lindley Berrie

What's in a Name?

I remember in second grade, being asked to recite a poem, proudly reciting Old King Cole- the last line being, 'He called for a light in the middle of the night to go to the WC.'

I did not know what a W.C. was. I was then shamed by being stood up while the teacher lectured me, although I had no idea what she was talking about.

Three American girls were given a one-day suspension from their high school for using the word 'vagina' while reading from the feminist play *The Vagina Monologues*.

The passage that landed the young girls in trouble reads, 'My short skirt is a liberation flag in the women's army. I declare these streets, any streets, my vagina country.'

Those who have seen the play know *The Vagina Monologues* celebrates female sexuality and focuses on the abuses that women suffer.

This is very different from the coy expression 'down there'. Yet there is still a lot of reluctance to use the correct words for the genital area such as vulva, clitoris and vagina.

I recently heard a true story about an older woman being told she would

be kicked in the vagina by some young girls for chiding them over their behaviour.

Louise Anike

On Violence

As I read about the various meetings and committees that are set up to talk about solutions to violence, I wonder what good they will do.

We have men who rape other men. We have men who attack each other over the footy results.

We have men who kill or maim their partners, male or female. We have wars over which religion is the right one. We have men who father children but do not want to take any responsibility for them.

Not all the perpetrators come from deprived backgrounds, so where does the violence come from?

I think it is something we will never see the end of, I think that to all the wife-beaters and women-killers it is a show of power, as women have shown that they can be leaders and take corporate positions. As women have decided they want a say in their lives and men cannot face the fact that they no longer can keep the "little woman" down.

We will be fighting until we drop to stop violence, and men will never learn.

Josie Jackson

OWN regrets

I heard from a couple of friends who are members of your network that an abridged version of my poem, originally titled 'Where the Bloody Hell' had appeared in your November newsletter. I subsequently saw the publication and feel rather disappointed that the poem appeared in this form...

This poem is a tribute to the older woman with whom I have shared a 53-year relationship through some very good and some desperate times, and to my two children who have made our years of activism in the causes mentioned worthwhile. It is that simple gesture of love and understanding expressed in the squeezing of the hand and the jocular expression of affection that gets the juices flowing. Read as it is, it seems that the Demo is the motivating and energising force.

Flattered as I am that someone thought the poem worth printing, I thought I should let you know of my disappointment. I must try to remember in future to ask that only the full version and the original format be reproduced. I have enclosed a copy of the original to let you see how it was intended to look.

Sorry to seem like a grumpy old man. Best wishes to you, and keep up the good work in your worthy cause.

Don Brown

OWN Matters sincerely apologises for the omission of the first two stanzas of Don Brown's poem, and of his loving tribute to his 'older woman', and wishes the world had more 'grumpy old men' like him. Due to lack of space we cannot print his poem in full, but gladly provide the last stanza:

And "Where the bloody hell were you?" my wife breaks in at last I'm wrenched back to the present from the worries of the past. "I've found your bloody car keys, and the discount petrol docket. You changed into your working duds and left them in your pocket.

Continues page 16

Letters to the Editor

Continuation of full stanza of Don Brown's poem

Your daughter rang a while ago. I looked but couldn't find you. There's a demo on tomorrow and she wanted to remind you." And then she gives my hand a squeeze, and says "I love our kids And their stupid bloody father that I wouldn't swap for quids." And suddenly I'm young again with all my juices flowing There's a demo on tomorrow, and by bloody hell I'm going.

Don Brown

Men in Labour

Back in the days when husbands were never allowed in the labour ward, I felt sorry for their wives but I also had a sneaking sympathy for the men.

Poor fellows, they often turned up after their child was born carrying a bunch of wilting flowers and obviously drunk. Having been dismissed by the nursing staff, and unlikely to get much sympathy from either Mother, where else could they go for support but to the pub? There they would get plenty of sympathy and also lots of liquid comfort.

Although many men wanted to be present at the birth of their children, they were up against entrenched opposition from the medical profession, who weren't at all interested in changing a system that worked well for them.

At the small Upper Hunter hospital where I was matron, this matter came to a head one day in 1963. We had two births imminent and keeping us busy, when in came two young men with their wives about to have their first babies. They had come much too

early, but as one was a farmer from well out of town, and as the other simply wouldn't go away, we put their wives into a 2-bed ward while their husbands sat chain-smoking on the verandah outside their window, rushing to find an already busy staff member every time there was a groan from within. They still had a long wait, their cigarette butts were choking the verandah garden, and there was a good chance they would drive us crazy.

I made a desperation-driven decision. They were given a thorough surgical scrub, put into gowns, caps and masks, and set to work massaging their wives' backs and keeping out of our way.

When it was time to go to the labour ward, it seemed natural to let them accompany their wives, on the promise that they would leave at once if they were asked to. Doctor wasn't too impressed, but the fellows didn't get in the way, and they were there at the birth of their firstborn. At the same time, of course, a precedent was born. Other prospective fathers began asking to attend the birth.

I still wasn't sure I was doing the right thing, until one of the husbands, already father of five, came to me after he had attended the birth of his sixth child. 'I will always love my children equally, Matron', he said, 'and I'll never tell them that the child I saw into the world is special'. There wasn't any doubt for me after that, and the fathers in that small town were among the first in the Hunter Valley to routinely witness the birth of their children.

When I moved to take charge of a much larger hospital nearby, the local doctors refused to even consider this practice, the most adamant being the senior doctor. Then came the day when a young couple from long-time family friends asked him the Big

Question. 'Ask Matron', he said, trying to fob them off and no doubt hoping I'd fall in line with his views on the matter. Along they came, and treacherous Matron said 'Yes, of course'. After that, the fellows became not only acceptable but expected in the labour ward.

Why did we think it was all so new? A carpenter called Joseph did it all by himself, in a stable, 2000 years ago.

Mona Wacker

Last month due to a computer error we incorrectly attributed an article on the International Year of the Mother to Merle Jones. Here is the correct version. – Editorial Team

Year of the Mother

I made an approach to Unifem Australia (United Nations Development Fund for Women) in January, for consideration to be given by the United Nations to naming an "International Year of the Mother".

Ros Strong, President of Unifem Australia, has been extremely helpful and has contacted Unifem New York and ascertained that the procedure is for a member nation of the UN to make the proposal.

With this in view Ros will make an approach to the Federal Government, on my behalf, to ask if Australia would make the proposal. She is also contacting affiliated organisations seeking support.

Attached is the text of my letter to Unifem outlining the reasons for my request, which I hope will be of interest to OWN members.

Merle Jones

Request to Unifem Australia for a UN “International Year of the Mother”

Thank you for your interest in my request.

Childbirth is the foundation of life and it is during pregnancy, childbirth and while caring for her young that a woman is most vulnerable, even under the most ideal conditions. In many parts of the world, however, the conditions under which mothers are trying to give birth to, and care for their young are a long way from ideal.

I am sure you are aware that although this is an era of advanced medical capabilities, an astonishing number of women die in childbirth due to a lack of basic midwifery assistance. Violence towards women and children is one of the greatest health problems worldwide and domestic violence very often starts or escalates when the woman becomes pregnant and/or soon after the birth of her child.

With the atrocities being inflicted on women and children in war zones, with ethnic cleansing, people trafficking and mothers being forced into prostitution so they can feed their children, surely it is time for their cries for help to be heard.

No woman should be forced to become a mother against her will, but every mother has the right to respect and support and to be able to bear her children and raise her young in as safe and healthy an environment as possible.

Everyone exists because a woman risked her life to bring them into the world. The contribution that mothers make is enormous and should never be pushed aside as not worthy of attention.

To dishonour the childbearers is to dishonour life itself, as it is the spirit of the mother that keeps the world living.

Merle Jones

UNIFEM is the women's fund at the United Nations, providing financial support and technical assistance to innovative programmes promoting women's human rights, their economic and political empowerment, and gender equality in more than 100 countries. In 2006, UNIFEM commemorated its 30th anniversary.

For more information, visit www.unifem.org or ring 02 9181 2796

Another use for RU486

FIBROIDS in the uterus can be reduced in size by a low dose of RU486 – a drug that inhibits the hormone progesterone and is otherwise known as the abortion pill.

The new study, appearing in a recent issue of *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, also claims that RU486 could greatly improve the quality of life of the 50 per cent of women aged 35 to 49 who suffer from the pain and heavy bleeding of fibroids.

Thirty-seven pre-menopausal women completed the six-month clinical trial. They were randomly assigned to receive a daily dose of either 5mg of RU486 or a placebo pill.

Quality of life was assessed using a survey, and there was no difference between the groups at the start of the study. After six months of treatment, women on RU486 reported a great improvement, 135%, in their quality of life, while those taking the placebo reported only a small improvement of 41%. Blood loss and anemia were also reduced in women taking RU486.



“IF IT HAS THE WORD ‘ECTRWY’ AFTER IT, I’VE ALREADY HAD IT!”

Preparing for Your Mammogram

Many women are anxious about mammograms, but there is no need to worry.

By taking a few minutes each day for a week preceding the exam and doing the following exercises, you will be totally prepared for the test and best of all, you can do these simple exercises right in and around your home.

EXERCISE ONE: Open your refrigerator door and insert one breast in door. Shut the door as hard as possible and lean on the door for good measure.

Hold that position for five seconds. Repeat again in case the first time wasn't effective enough.

EXERCISE TWO: Visit your garage at 3 AM when the temperature of the cement floor is just perfect. Take off all your clothes and lie comfortably on the floor with one breast wedged under the rear tire of the car. Ask a friend to slowly back the car up until your breast is sufficiently flattened and chilled.

Turn over and repeat with the other breast.

EXERCISE THREE: Freeze two metal bookends overnight. Strip to the waist. Invite a stranger into the room. Press the bookends against one of your breasts.

Smash the bookends together as hard as you can. Set up an appointment with the stranger to meet next year and do it again.

YOU ARE NOW TOTALLY PREPARED!

Contributed by Maureen King

OWN ADVOCACY

Who wins? Is it us?

As I write this, the elections are two weeks off. As you read this they will be last week's news.

Did you have any input at all into the lead up to the election? Pollies questioned about future policies, letters expressing concern about the lack of services, about the problems in the area of age care, anything at all? Or was it all too hard? I wish I could be paid a commission every time I hear the comment, "What can I do?" That seems to always be accompanied by a shrug of the shoulders.

Where is your voice? As women we have not reached this stage of our lives by accident. We have worked jolly hard to bring up families, hold down jobs, run P and C's to service the needs of our kids' schools so that their education could be the best we could give them; worked in the community propping up under-funded government services so that meals on wheels got delivered, rural fire fighters had back-up so they could do their jobs. We took first aid courses and helped with guides, St John's Ambulance, churches etc. The list is unending.

Some of us can no longer do these things, though those who do struggle on until they can hardly walk. But we can still talk, we can still protest and we can still write to those who need to be told that they are not doing the job we elected them to do.

There was an article in the *Daily Telegraph* on 13 March which lamented the lack of interest in International Women's Day. It pointed out that attendance at the march was poor and that there was an air of apathy about the whole event. It questioned the need for such a day and asked, "Do we have all we fought for?" I don't think so!

On 8 and 9 March I asked every woman I spoke to if they were doing or had they done anything to celebrate IWD. About eighty percent did not even know it was on. I am pleased to say those that did were all OWN Members.

Recently two of our members had emergencies that needed the help of services provided, (or not) by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC). It was impossible to speak to a worker or get any immediate assistance. One was told they could make an appointment to speak to a worker in two weeks' time. The other was given an assurance that a particular kind of help may be available at some time or other, but not the medical help that was needed then and there.

So where does that leave us as an organisation? Our advocates are few. Those we have work hard at maintaining and improving the services we have, but we all have to be aware. We do have a voice and we must use it. Apathy never achieved anything and we have proved over the years that the best help we can get is what we provide ourselves by working together.

The elections are over, the promises made. It's up to us all to keep reminding those in government that they are there to serve the public – and they had better do so.

Barbara Malcolm



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

To march or not to march are tensions flavouring IWD in some places – along with other tensions as well between different groups of women. Not to mention the 'usual' tensions over our 'issues'.

I really need to understand what brings about the decision not to march - and why IWD has turned into just a celebration or a breakfast or lecture or festival or, in some places, no women's protest at all.

For the IWD herstoricals please ask all the women you know if they are interested in contributing to updating Joyce Stevens' *History Of IWD*. If interested please email me with details. Joyce's book is based on the first 10 years – and this time round it is 'the next 20 years' to 2005 - with a living herstory to date.

Susanne Martain

International Women's Day Web (est 1996)
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OWN ADVOCACY

IR Laws at Work

You may have noticed that recently it has become much more difficult to get service in Myers stores because there are very few people working on the floors. This has happened since the passing of the much discussed IR laws. If you shop in Myers and have become annoyed by this lack of service, you'll be interested to know that you are dealing with what is called 'lean marketing'. Don't blame the few people working there. Myers has radically reorganised its staff to achieve this 'lean marketing', and it has had a big impact on their lives.

In the past it had suited Myers to operate with a mixture of permanent, part-time and casual staff. Now they have very few casuals. Their jobs have gone. Most of the permanent staff now have to work alternate weekends; part-timers, who already worked alternate weekends, have now been put on a rolling roster as well.

What does that mean, 'a rolling roster'? Just that the days you work keep changing. It sounds like casual work to me. Myers have turned their part-time workers into casual workers, but are only paying them at part-time rates.

So they can't choose which days they work ... so what? Most of these part-time workers are older workers and they accepted part-time work because they could use the days off, weekdays, for important other things. Going to tech or uni or U3A, doing volunteer work, minding a grandchild so their daughter could go to tech. Well, so what?

You can't enrol for a class that you might get to one week in three.

You can't do volunteer work unless you can nominate when you can be there.

You can't help your daughter by minding your grandchild if you can only do it alternate weeks.

This rolling roster is saving Myers a lot of money, but it has caused radical upheavals and distress in the lives of their staff. Many resigned. Some are negotiating to try to get one day off that is important to them. Now the exact details of the contract are still being discussed, and many are worried about loss of penalty rates.

Myer staff have been told that the contracts will be 'sign or resign'. Such is the power of the employer under the new IR laws. No balance.

If the lack of service in Myers stores annoys you, write to them. If the imbalance caused by the IR laws concerns you, attend the rally on April 22 and write to your Federal member.

Lorraine Inglis

ROCKIN' FOR RIGHTS PROTEST MARCH

Sunday April 22
Hyde Park to SCG

Assemble Hyde Park 11am

Write it into your diary, engrave it in your brain. Make no other bookings for this date.

COME AND BE COUNTED

Howard has gotten away with broken promises, lies, terrible legislature, winding down services, destroying our institutions, persecuting refugees and so much more. Each time, the anger has faded. People have forgotten or ignored his excesses by the time of the next election.

But this is the time to remind people about the IR Laws, to put them out there in the public arena. If we do not show up in **HUGE NUMBERS** at this protest rally then we have wasted our opportunity. These laws will affect our children and our grandchildren. Eventually they will affect services we have now.

Many believe that these laws are one thing that the voting public will not accept. And this rally, march and concert should remind them about how these laws have taken away the ability of workers to fight for their rights.

YOUR RIGHTS

WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Even if you are no longer employed, you are still fighting for your rights and the rights of others. These IR laws will particularly affect women, because their unions can no longer protect them.

- " If you are not interested in the concert, help fill the streets in the march.
- " If you can no longer march, help swell the numbers at the rally.
- " By coming out to be counted, you are registering a protest against the current federal government.

Lorraine Inglis

Our OWN Writers

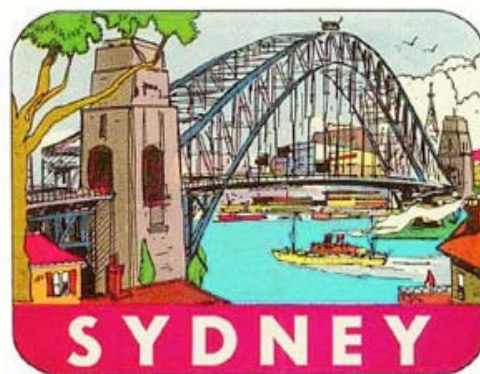
My First British Breakfast

Soon after WW2, as a young migrant from Czechoslovakia, I spent my first week in England at a boarding house in London. In the dining room there people sat at separate tables, so I was left to my own devices.

On my first morning, I was curious, as I had heard that the British ate big breakfasts, as opposed to our usual bread roll with butter and milk coffee. Indeed, as soon as I sat down, a bowl of something was set in front of me. It contained a warm greyish goo, not at all enticing for me to try. When the waitress passed me again, I asked her: "Vut iss zis?" With a surprised look, she informed me: "It's porridge, dear." Not any wiser, I cautiously dipped my spoon into it and popped it in my mouth. The resulting taste was so awful, that if I hadn't been brought up with good manners, I would have spat it out. It did not occur to me that the jug of milk and the bowl of sugar on the table were meant to go with the porridge. The rest of it was left for the waitress to remove. Just as well that I didn't indulge in more, as another plate appeared, on which I recognised a fried egg with something that looked partly red and partly a burnt black. I enjoyed the egg, and then plucked up the courage to try that new stuff. To my surprise, I liked it, especially that crunchy burnt part, which reminded me of the cracklings made from goose skin that used to be a favourite of mine at home.

When the waitress collected my plate, she remarked: "Help yourself to tea at the counter, loove", pointing in that direction. I'd never had tea for breakfast before. At home, we used to save this precious drink for the evening when there was more time to relax with it and savour it. Come to think of it, we never really savoured the tea itself, as we would lace it with a good squeeze of lemon and plenty of sugar. However, I was determined to follow the British customs now that I was here. So I poured myself a cup of tea from the large teapot at the counter. It looked a lot darker than I was used to. I also helped myself to some slices of lemon, which I pressed hard to get the juice out. Back at my table, as I tasted it, it was decidedly bitter, in spite of two teaspoons of sugar. Then I remembered that the English drank their tea with milk. So I poured some milk into my cup and stirred it. Suddenly the cup was filled with unsightly white bits floating around. 'The English sure have different ways to ours', I thought. Now it tasted worse still. I gave up on breakfast for that day, having at least scored one out of three. From this brief experience I realised that I would have a lot to learn yet.

Trudy Davis



Time Capsule

Seventy five years ago the small town of Manildra in the Central West of N.S.W. was sizzling with excitement. It was the year of the opening of the Harbor Bridge.

A goodwill message was sent by school children from school to school, beginning at Tottenham in the centre of the State, to be delivered in a cylinder to Mr Lang at the Opening. Bob, who lived on the next door property, and I, were chosen to ride to the nearest school, Borenore to deliver the precious message, which would be passed on to the next school. We were nervous and excited. We groomed our horses until they shone, painted their hooves with neatsfoot oil and even had a go at plaiting their tails. But no way were they going to look like poncy polo ponies.

We were given a send off at the Town Hall where we proudly put our immature signatures to the great scroll of names. The Mayor ceremoniously put the scroll into its shiny brass cylinder, the crowd cheered, the band played and off we went.

On the day of the opening we gathered 'round our valve wireless, listening to the commentary.

Premier Lang raised his scissors to cut the ribbon, then pandemonium broke loose. We heard horse's hooves and gasps from the crowd. Captain de Groote from the New Guard dressed in his splendid uniform on his equally splendid horse rode up, dramatically swept his shiny sword above his head and cut the ribbon with a flourish. What drama! We talked about it for years.

But what happened to our cylinder? I searched in the Mitchell Library. What category would it be under? No luck there. Did it fall into the Harbour in the confusion? So, the big question is. Where is that cylinder now?

Joan Johns

Our OWN Writers

Glimpsing the Future

Do you ever feel a vague disquiet that you ought to be doing some sort of altruistic service for others but, because of various responsibilities already in hand, somehow don't get around to it?

Thanks to the many advertisements that come my way via journals, emails and friends, I noticed a series of lectures, "Conversations – food for thought" to be held at the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts. Eva Cox was to address the audience about "Shopping for Happiness" on the first one I could attend. Eva has long since been a hero of mine so that clinched it. I learnt subsequently that she is on the Board of the SMSA. The last topic of this series was "Altruism – do we really only act out of self-interest?" and was to be addressed by Georgie Vestey [founder of Sydney Talks website] and Les McDonald, the current CEO of Meals on Wheels. I knew this talk would be particularly stimulating because of the vague disquiet already hinted at above.

Is altruism innate or the result of social enculturation? Or both? Les McDonald dismissed the question as unimportant. What matters is that altruism exists in us somehow. Georgie V., referring to British experience where the shortage of volunteers is acute, mentioned that studies there reveal education programs promoting volunteerism were ineffective in changing attitudes. An audience member quipped that young people were naturally altruistic but "grew out of it" by adulthood.

Les pointed out that social cohesion is a fundamental of our contemporary infatuation with productivity and the market. Without that cohesion, the market fails. And yet that is where many rest their faith today, in the market economy. Work harder, earn more, buy more. But at the same time, the need for more people to become involved in giving themselves and their time for the good of all is becoming acute, given the increasing numbers of people of all ages living alone [by 2020 it is predicted that will be 50%] and in particular the burgeoning ageing population.

Eva Cox pointed out that long-term volunteering for charities such as Meals on Wheels, though traditional, is not the attitude of people in today's changed and changing world. Young people (i.e. under 45 or 50) live in a highly pressured world with many conflicting demands on their time. The idea of committing themselves for lengthy periods to any voluntary activity goes immediately into the too hard basket. And yet, when ad hoc disasters occur, many people do give generously of their time and assistance. How can this impulse to altruism be harnessed?

Les agreed that new approaches to the challenge of social need are required. Meals on Wheels was faced with this dilemma when it found its traditional "western" method of reaching out to Aboriginal communities with its meals program failed. They had to try something new. As a result, they set up a study into the stories of the Aboriginal communities they were aiming to assist to determine how they might better serve them. Since then, new programs based on the new understandings gained have been instituted with heartening results.

The meeting closed on a hopeful note as members began to see possibilities for positive change arising from government sponsored investigation into how ordinary people live, what they perceive as the most pressing matters needing social co-operation and how they thought they could contribute. Such an investigation need not cost much but has the potential of opening the way for ordinary people to give of themselves in ways that are feasible, significant for the maintenance of society and personally satisfying. To me, this is a welcome idea. If volunteering could be taken on when one has time and capacity rather than in terms of lengthy commitment, the prospect would look much more inviting.

NB OWN members may be interested to know that the SMSA will be commencing a new series of lectures, this time on democracy, starting 14 March, 12.30 to 1.30pm in their headquarters at 280 Pitt Street Sydney. Telephone 02 9262 – 7300. www.sydneymsa.com.au.

Bev Cameron



The Last Word?

Hell on Earth

In May/June 2007, Australia will host the largest military exercises (designated Talisman Sabre) ever held in peacetime.

Twelve thousand Australian soldiers and fourteen thousand US military will take part in bombarding OUR shores and fragile landscape, storming our beaches, gunning down 'terrorists' in the newly built urban guerilla warfare training centre, testing their latest laser guided missiles and 'smart' bombs in some of the most pristine wilderness on this planet.

Idyllic Shoalwater Bay near Rockhampton will cop it all. LIVE aerial bombing, ship-to-shore naval firings, underwater depth charges exploded in areas where turtles and dugong breed, nuclear subs using high level sonar frequency which destroys the hearing of sea life and mammals, nuclear aircraft carriers inside the Great Barrier Reef marine national park, land-based artillery firings in areas where the most amazing biodiversity in Australia can be found ... get the picture?

These LIVE munitions actions at Shoalwater Bay will run simultaneously with US bombing runs by Stealth, B1 and B52 bombers. (Just one B52 bomber carries 30 tonnes of bombs and needs three semi trailers to load it up.) These visitors from Guam will drop their LIVE payload at five kilometers altitude on Delamare bombing range near Katherine NT, and there will be live fire exercise involving many Abrams tanks rumbling across the landscape at Bradshaw tank range. This range is surrounded by Bradshaw National Park, south of Darwin, where target practising on Country is against the express wishes of the Aboriginal elders, custodians of that Country.

These military exercises and their co-ordination in both states will be beamed live via satellite from tiny cameras on the tanks, bombers, landing craft, army commanders' lapels etc to the co-coordinating War Room in Newcastle NSW, where the US and Australian generals will call the shots.

Why are we allowing such madness to take place? The then Defence Minister, Robert Hill, and present Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, signed a secret treaty with Donald Rumsfeld and Colin Powell back in July 2004. This is the treaty that permits the United States military to come to Australia and do as they wish.

A movement is building up to peacefully protest this event. For further information go to www.peaceconvergence.com

Contributed by Daphne Lera



Bequests to the Older Women's Network

If you would like to include a bequest to OWN in your Will, the following options will guide you in its wording.

Please specify which Older Women's Network you wish to be the recipient of your gift: Older Women's Network NSW or the *Older Women's Network, Sydney.*

Option No. 1

I devise the sum of \$ to the Older Women's Network for the general purpose of the Older Women's Network OR the specific purpose of

..... such purpose being consistent with the aims and objectives of the Older Women's Network, to be administered by the Older Women's Network.

Option No 2

(for a proportional bequest) I give% of my estate to the Older Women's Network for its general purpose or the specific purpose of

The gift you make to OWN will be an enduring record of your generosity.

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